

A Ten-Year Reflection



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Five initiatives launched during my term as AASL President (2006–2007) continue to have an impact on school librarians ten years later. These initiatives include the rewriting of AASL's learning standards, introduction of the SKILLS Act for which AASL advocated tirelessly, the presentation of the Crystal Apple Award to Scholastic Library Publishing for their first "School Libraries Work" reports, revitalizing School Library Month, and establishing the AASL Best Websites for Teaching and Learning Committee.

Updating Learning Standards

The first initiative was the rewriting of the AASL standards. The AASL Board of Directors and Executive Committee, knowing that updating of the standards was long overdue, decided in 2005 to put the project on the fast track to be ready for implementation in two years or less. The project began ten years ago with the formation of a visioning group made up of state leaders. The group spent a weekend working together and in small groups to create a vision of what the future would look like for school librarians, libraries, and patrons. Many of those attendees have gone on to be leaders for AASL in the roles of president and task force and committee chairs or members. The work from this talented group was then forwarded to a small committee made up of representatives and leaders in the realm of school libraries. One of the writers of the standards, Barbara Stripling, later became president of ALA. Many task forces and committees evolved to share and implement the new *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner*, published in 2007. School librarians then



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used the resulting publications by the committees to revise school library programs to implement the new standards and improve success for their students. Last year work began to update the standards to move school libraries and librarians forward once again.

SKILLS Act

In the summer of 2007 Senators Jack Reed (D-RI) and Thad Cochran (R-MS), and Representatives Raul Grijalva (D-AZ) and Vernon Ehlers (R-MI) introduced the Strengthening Kids' Interest in Learning and Libraries (SKILLS) Act. This bipartisan effort was intended to ensure that students would have access to effective school library programs with higher staffing levels and led by certified school librarians, resources that studies had shown to be linked to higher student test scores. The act sought to increase the number of state-certified school librarians within a school district. It just so happened that the ALA Annual Conference was being held in Washington, DC, in 2007. Thanks to the coordination efforts of the ALA Washington Office, there was an outdoor demonstration of support on the Hill; from a podium, ALA President Leslie Burger and I spoke to the masses that had gathered. Supporters were adorned in red t-shirts encouraging a "Vote for School Libraries." The sea of red was a sight to behold. People continually chanted "1, 2, 3 support school libraries."

The SKILLS Act was not passed in 2007 but evolved over the years as Senator Jack Reed kept the act alive by reintroducing the bill in subsequent years. In 2015 the long struggle to have school librarians and libraries recognized as vital to a strong school program was fulfilled by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Senator Reed had influenced the final edition of ESSA with his introduction of S.312, the 2015 SKILLS Act, drafted as an amendment to the 1965 ESEA. S.312 proposed amending the 1965 ESEA to include elements of effective school library programs in school improvement programs, to provide a definition of an effective school library program that includes staffing by a "state certified or licensed school librarian," and to amend the name of part A of title II of ESEA ("Teacher and Principal Training and Recruiting Fund") to include school librarians: "Teacher, School Librarian, and Principal Training and Recruiting Fund" (U.S. Senate 2015a).

ESSA requires state and local education agencies to use funds under the program to train school librarians and recruit and retain highly effective school librarians. ESSA now includes new provisions that authorize—but do not require—school districts to include in their local plans how they will assist schools in developing effective school library programs to provide students with opportunities to develop digital literacy skills and improve academic achievement. Title I and Title II funds can be

used by school districts to improve their school library programs (U.S. Senate 2015b).

Crystal Apple Award

One of the perks of being AASL President is the opportunity to bestow the Crystal Apple Award. The award is given to an individual or group for having a significant impact on school libraries and students. The 2007 recipient was Scholastic Library Publishing. In 2004 Scholastic began producing "School Libraries Work: A Compendium of Research Supporting the Effectiveness of School Libraries," an amalgamation of the results of state studies that documented the positive impact school library programs have on student achievement.

Many school librarians have used the four editions of this document to show their school administrators and parents the significance of having a certified school librarian and an effective school library program. The 2016 compendium builds upon the 2008 edition. Studies have now been conducted in twenty-five U.S. states and one Canadian province. Sharing this publication with parents and administrators helps school librarians advocate for the programs they have or the program changes they would like to implement for improving student performance. I'm happy to have had a small part in encouraging Scholastic to continue to generate the "School Libraries Work" reports.

School Library Month

At an Executive Committee meeting in 2006 we were brainstorming how to get our members more involved in AASL and to provide services that members would enthusiastically implement at their buildings. From that meeting two ideas emerged: revitalizing School Library Week and

creating a process to identify Best Websites for Teaching and Learning. Both ideas evolved into new task forces that later became standing committees.

School Library Month now has an official spokesperson and promotional items such as bookmarks, posters, and infographics. Spokespersons have included authors and actresses. It has evolved from a program that was once promoted primarily in school libraries to a social media blitz that reaches everyone.

Best Websites for Teaching and Learning

The Best Websites for Teaching and Learning Task Force led by Pam Berger evolved into a standing committee once the task force defined the parameters for evaluating websites and making recommendations. In 2009 the committee presented their first list of the top twenty-five sites; the list was organized by categories tied to AASL's *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner*. The categories were: Organizing and Managing, Content Collaboration, Curriculum Sharing, Media Sharing, Virtual Environments, and Social Networking and Communication. Some of the sites on that first list are no longer available but others, such as Twitter, are still going strong. The categories have been tweaked over the years, but the sites recommended remain vetted, high-quality, and mostly free for school librarians to use or promote in their schools.

An outgrowth of this project was the establishment of the Best Apps for Teaching and Learning that produced its first list of the top twenty-five in 2013, based on the categories of Books, STEM, Organization and Management, Social Sciences, and Content Creation.

The lists' benefit for school librarians is that the sites and apps are recognized, reliable, and researched resources that will enhance the work of school librarians, and the teachers and students they serve. Now when asked for a site or app to fill a need in the classroom, the school librarian can consult the lists instead of spending hours searching. The owners of the sites are given an official AASL seal to display so that visitors will know a national association representing school librarians recommends the site.

Looking Ahead

AASL is a vibrant and evolving association that works to meet the needs of its members in the present as well as into the future. Reflecting on how the above five activities from my presidential year have evolved and remained relevant in the past ten years amazes me. What will the next ten years bring?



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